

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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VERONICA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."
IN FIVE BOOKS.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER X. ABSIT OMEN.

VERONICA dismissed the woman and sat down to consider the situation. She was frightened to the bottom of her heart.

Paul coming from the Villa Reale at that hour of the morning, and on that special morning, was alarming. But Paul denying that he had been there, and stating that he had come from an opposite quarter, was more alarming still! She had been watched—overheard; to what extent? How much had Paul seen and listened to? She sat twisting a ring round and round on her finger, and pressing it pitilessly into the tender flesh until a deep red mark grew beneath the gold circlet—she who was usually so sensitive to bodily pain, and shrank from it with such abject dread!

Above the great fear that seemed to fill her being, there flashed now and again a recurrent sentiment of anger; like white foam surging over a dark sea. She was angry with Barletti. Why had he chosen that time to speak to her so unguardedly? True, the appointment to meet him was of her making, but she had never contemplated having a love-scene. She wanted sympathy and service; not a passionate declaration! The passion was good in so far as it lent zeal to the service, and fervour to the sympathy. The moment it lifted its voice to plead and demand on its own account, passion was a hindrance and an injury to her. It was inopportune. There might come a moment when it would be welcome. But now—! Who could tell the extent of the ruin that

Barletti's rashness might bring upon her? She pushed her hair up from her forehead, thrusting her fingers through and through the rich rippling locks, and rocked from side to side on her chair.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" she murmured, in a kind of chant over and over again, making her voice rise and fall in a regular monotonous inflection: as though she were trying to lull her terrors to sleep as a nurse lulls a baby, by the mechanical repetition.

The hours went by. All was quiet in the house. Everything seemed to be going on as usual. It was nearly twelve o'clock when Veronica looked at her watch. She was a little reassured by the calm that reigned—unreasonably reassured, as she told herself; for the storm whose breaking she dreaded was not likely to burst forth in such sort as to startle the whole household.

Presently her maid tapped at the door which Veronica had fastened on the inside.

"Will miladi please to dress for the déjeuner?" said the woman. She had been scandalised by the fact of her mistress having dressed herself, and chose to ignore the possibility of her appearing at breakfast in a toilet achieved without due professional assistance.

Veronica admitted her.

"I shall not change my dress, Julianne," she said. "But you can throw a wrapper over me and brush my hair. I have a slight headache, and that will soothe me."

In fact the regular passage of the skillfully-wielded brush through her long hair did soothe her. And under its influence she was enabled to collect herself and to think a little, instead of merely feeling and fearing, as she had done hitherto.

"Is Sir John coming to breakfast?" she asked, after a while.

"No, madame—miladi: I believe not. When Paul took him his chocolate at nine o'clock he said that he was not to be waited for at breakfast. Ah—h—h!"

The woman gave a long sigh, so elaborate, and so evidently meant to attract attention, that Veronica asked, "What is the matter with you, Julianne?"

"With me, miladi? Nothing! But with Sir John—ah—h—h!"

It seemed to Veronica that her heart stood still for a moment, and then went on beating again with a great leap that sickened her. As usual she resented the painful sensation and revenged herself on the maid. Veronica was a perfect conductor of pain. She transmitted it instantly to the nearest recipient.

"Julianne, you are insupportable! How dare you startle me in that manner? What do you mean? Are you crazy?"

"A thousand pardons, miladi, no: I am not crazy. But—"

Veronica saw the woman's face in the glass. It was a little sullen, but through the sullenness pierced an eager, self-important look. She had something to say, and would not allow herself to be balked of saying it by resentment at her mistress's asperity.

"Well? Is Sir John worse? Is anything the matter? Do you know anything?"

"Miladi, I know this much: I saw the doctor who has been coming every morning—every morning—so quietly slipping in and out, I watched him—well, I saw him this morning, but not alone. No, miladi, there was another with him—a consultation you see! And as they were going away I heard them talking; and though I did not understand every word, I have Italian enough to make out that they thought it a very bad case. And the new doctor said to the old one as they went out, 'I give him a month.' Then the other muttered something, and the new doctor said again, 'Ah, but in this case the constitution is shattered.' And then he said—something else: I don't know what, miladi." Julianne checked herself just in time to avoid repeating to "miladi" sundry criticisms respecting Sir John's temper, manners, and mode of life, which were by no means of a flattering nature.

It did not strike Veronica that the maid's mode of revealing her news, or indeed the fact of her revealing it at all, was a proof that "miladi's" affection for Sir John was not deemed very tender or devoted. Julianne had obviously no fear that she might be

dealing a heavy blow to her mistress's heart in repeating the verdict of the physicians. But that consideration did not occur to Veronica.

Her first fear, that Paul had watched her, traced her to the Villa Reale, and revealed what he had heard to Sir John, was driven out; but it was only driven out by a second, and a greater apprehension. Sir John was very ill; despaired of; dying! She allowed the maid to coil up her hair, keeping, herself, a dead silence. Her cheeks were very pale. The face that fronted her in the glass was a strangely different face from that which had been used to be mirrored in her old bedroom at home. The rich colouring which had been its most striking charm had faded in a great measure. Under her eyes were dark tints that made their brightness ghastly. The whole face seemed to have fallen. There were even some haggard lines around the mouth. Her youth still asserted itself in the satin texture of her skin, and the rich abundance of her raven hair. She was still beautiful. But she was no longer that embodiment of Hebe-like, gladsome beauty that she had been a year ago.

She stared at her own image with a puckered brow, and pained compression of the lips. "I look old!" she thought. But she said no syllable.

"Dame! She seems quite to take it to heart!" thought the maid, much surprised. "Can she be uneasy about his will? But these great folks are always provided for by the contract of marriage." Mademoiselle Julianne had lived in very "good" families.

After breakfast, Veronica went herself to Sir John's apartments to inquire how he was. The answer returned by Paul was that Sir John found himself tolerably well; and would be glad to speak to miladi if she would give herself the trouble of coming to his dressing-room in about half an hour. That half hour was a terrible one to Veronica.

Her thoughts seemed to be hurt which way soever she turned them, like a bruised body to which the slightest movement is pain. If he had sent for her to reveal the desperate condition of his health, that would be terrible. But, on the other hand, if that were not the object of this interview—if she were to be accused, reproached, how should she meet it? Resentment and defiance seemed her only resources. Reproach from him! That would be too monstrous! And yet the idea of defiance was frightful to her. It would be decisive, irrevocable.

Veronica had a constitutional antipathy

to a clearly-marked and unwavering course of action. She loved to leave the outlines of her conduct blurred, so as to have some imaginary margin for escape from the legitimate consequences of her actions. The legitimate consequences of our actions are frequently cruel in their stern logic: and her unhappy, undisciplined nature shrank shuddering from the prospect of sustained endurance.

At the end of the allotted half hour she tapped at the door of Sir John's dressing-room; and the instant her fingers had made the sound, she was overcome by an access of terror, and would have turned and run away, had not Paul opened the door immediately upon her summons. He ushered her in respectfully; and she found herself seated—she scarcely knew how—on a low chair beside the sofa on which Sir John was reclining.

Their parts seemed to be for the moment reversed, for it was he who said in a tone of anxiety, "Good Heavens, how pale you are! Are you not well?"

He held out his thin, white hand to her, and lightly touched her fingers with his lips as he spoke. The words, and still more the action, caused a sudden revulsion of feeling in her fluttering heart. The blood rushed back to her cheeks and lips. Her eyes grew bright. The tension of the muscles of her face relaxed. He would not have greeted her so, had he suspected. She was safe! What a fool she had been to torment herself as she had done!

She answered sweetly, leaving her hand in his, "I was not well. I had a headache this morning. I went out early to get rid of it. Perhaps Paul told you?"

"Yes: Paul told me."

The tone of the reply startled her. She involuntarily glanced round at Paul, who was arranging his master's dressing-case. Paul looked grave, honest, melancholy, as usual.

"Basta! Go away, Paul, and don't come back till I ring for you," said Sir John, sharply.

Paul obeyed.

When they were alone together, Veronica said:

"I feared you were not so well this morning, so I came to inquire for you myself."

"How considerate you are!" said Sir John, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking at her from beneath that shelter.

It was not unusual with him to adopt a sneering tone, even in his best humours.

But the ring of his voice now seemed to Veronica false than usual. It might be that this was the effect of the fear which had left her nerves sensitive and quivering. At all events she would not display any mistrust of him at this moment.

"Are you feeling stronger this morning?" she asked.

"Stronger? Yes. Oh yes, certainly: a good deal stronger. Had you any reason for supposing the contrary?"

For a moment she hesitated in a little embarrassment. Then she answered, "My reason was, as I told you, that you did not come to breakfast."

"Ah yes: true! Of course. But now—tell me—you were out early this morning you say?"

"Yes."

She began to play with a string of amber beads that hung round her neck, and she shifted her chair a little.

"You are not comfortable," said Sir John, still watching her from beneath his hand.

"The—the light. There is such a glare."

"Ah, the light? Yes: when one has such a headache as yours—or even has had such a headache—the light is disagreeable. I am ashamed that you should have the trouble of moving that chair for yourself. But you see what a helpless creature I am—comparatively, that is: for the fact is, I am stronger, really stronger. Your kind anxiety about me does me good. It acts as a cordial."

"Then you do care for my kindness still?" she said, glancing at him, and then letting her eyes fall again immediately.

"Care for it! What else have I to care for, Veronica? It is everything to me. And it is so precious, so infinitely precious, in itself!"

She knelt down beside him. Her hand was still twisted in the string of amber beads, and she played with them nervously as she spoke. "And why do you not secure it, this kindness that you value, for ever? Why do you not relieve me from the suspense that—I confess it—makes my temper fretful and my spirits dull at times?"

"You do not doubt me, Veronica?"

"No, no. But suspense and procrastination are wearing."

"You do trust me?"

"Yes."

"You trust me as—as I trust you. And you shall find that your confidence will meet with its deserts. Do you know what news I heard yesterday?"

"No. News? News from England?"

"Don't excite yourself. You will make your headache worse."

"Oh, my headache is gone."

"Aye; but it may come back. It is of a kind that may return at any moment."

Still the old sneer in his tone! And something subdued and *lurking* in his whole manner, that she could not define to herself, but that made its impression upon her.

"Your news! Did you send for me to tell it to me?"

"Y—yes, partly, *mia cara*."

"Speak then!" she cried, with a flash of impatient temper that made him smile.

"Well—the news I heard yesterday, is that Her Majesty's ship *Furibond* is here at Naples, under the command of my old acquaintance Captain Reginald Burr."

"Well?" said Veronica, after a moment's pause of expectation.

"He is a very pleasant fellow, very pleasant indeed. I met him years ago at Spezia."

Veronica twisted her fingers more impatiently in the amber necklace, and drew her black brows together. She thought that Sir John had simply introduced this topic to avoid the turn their conversation had been taking, and to break the thread of it.

"What is his pleasantness to me?" she exclaimed, pettishly.

"His pleasantness? Not much. But his presence is a good deal to you."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Veronica, you know what I said just now, about our trust in one another. Faith is to be crowned at last. It has not been my fault—as you ought to know—that you have been kept in suspense so long. You have blamed me; but unjustly, as you will find."

She seemed stricken motionless, with her eyes fixed on his face; only the breath came and went quickly between her parted lips.

"I am not well enough to travel to Florence," he continued, watching her eager face with a strange, gloating look. "But—listen, Veronica *mia bella*!" He drew her head down to his lips and whispered a short sentence in her ear.

Her face glowed and changed like a scorched, drooping July rose after a summer shower. She sprang to her feet and clasped her hands together. In the sudden gesture of withdrawing her fingers from the necklace, the string snapped, and the amber beads rolled scattered hither and thither about the floor.

"You consent?" said Sir John.

"Yes, yes, yes. I—I have wronged you sometimes in my thoughts. Forgive me!" she exclaimed, impulsively, taking his hand in hers and kissing it.

"You will remember that it was this day I conceived the plan. This day. You will keep in your memory the date of the day on which you went out so early to the Villa Reale for your headache."

"I am not likely to need anything to remind me of to-day."

"No; but there is a good deal in association. Association aids memory so wonderfully. Now, *tesoro mio*, ring for Paul, and leave me. I am a little tired and over-excited."

"I will not disobey you to-day of all days," she said. Her countenance was radiant, her step elastic. Before she went away, she stooped to gather up the amber beads.

"There is some superstition about losing amber you have once worn," she said, smiling. "They say it is unlucky. But I shall prove the fallacy of the notion. My amber necklace broke and fell, at a moment of great happiness and good fortune."

"Yes. You will prove the fallacy of the superstition quite triumphantly. Ha!—it is curious—we, at least, may defy augury."

CHAPTER XI. HER MAJESTY'S SHIP THE FURIBOND.

THE Prince Alberto Barletti passed the greater part of his time in Paris. He was a poor man for his rank; and if he could have found some way of increasing his income without risk, he would have been very glad to avail himself of it. But he shrank from the idea of speculation. As to earning money, that was out of the question. And a desirable way of increasing his income without risk or trouble, had not yet occurred to him. One day, however, fortune seemed to remember him in a good-natured mood.

A company of English speculators commenced operations in Naples. They were to build and beautify. The first preliminary of course was to destroy. Many houses must be pulled down and their proprietors reimbursed. A good deal of diplomacy was expended on the powers that ruled such matters. People who possessed influence were canvassed diligently.

It chanced that Prince Barletti was, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be one of the influential. But how to obtain his good will? The English speculators, some of them, would have been a little clumsy in conducting the affair. But they had a clever

man in their pay who knew the world. The clever man was Mr. Sidney Frost, of the firm of Lovegrove and Frost, solicitors to the company. Mr. Frost soon learned that Prince Barletti was not rich in proportion to the illustriousness of his rank. In plain words, he might be open to a bribe. But the mode of offering the bribe was all-important. Mr. Frost, in consultation with the architects and surveyors, discovered that it would be very desirable to run a new road right through a palazzo owned by Prince Barletti. No one had thought, before, that the road could pass within half a mile of the palace. But Mr. Frost's opinion was speedily adopted.

Negotiations were set on foot with the prince. He had hitherto been understood to express himself hostilely towards the whole undertaking of this foreign company of speculators. But Mr. Frost thought it so desirable to persuade his Signoria Illustrissima, and to bring him round, that he started off from Naples after he had been there but a short time, and went to Paris armed with a letter of introduction, and with schemes and plans in which the new road over the site of the Palazzo Barletti was not forgotten. The prince showed himself open to conviction. He became a strong partisan of the English company, and his change of mind was followed by a corresponding change of mind in sundry individuals in Naples. It was a pity, said the prince, to destroy the old house. It had been associated with the family name for several generations. But he understood what was meant by public spirit, and he would not let his private feelings interfere with it.

"This Prince Bah-letty charges a pretty long price for his private feelings!" observed one of the directors of the English company when Mr. Frost laid before them the result of his mission to Paris. But Mr. Frost said he thought that the prince's private feelings were not very dear, considering that he *was* a prince. And he added that he thought they would be found to come cheap in the end.

The arrangement of this affair caused Mr. Frost to come in contact with the prince's younger brother, Cesare. The latter was charged by the head of the family to watch his interests. Cesare became greatly impressed by the combination in Mr. Frost of business shrewdness with an engaging manner. This was another kind of man from the slow, snuffy, solemn old "legale" Dottore Chiappi, with whom he had transacted business for his brother in Florence. They met, Cesare de' Barletti and

Sidney Frost, nearly every morning, either at the company's offices, or at Mr. Frost's hotel.

About a week after the memorable day of the interview in the Villa Reale between Veronica and Cesare, the latter was sitting with Mr. Frost in his rooms at Santa Lucia. They were seated near the window; and were vaguely looking out at the blue sparkling sea, and settling some few last particulars relative to their business. For Mr. Frost was to leave Naples by the steamer for Marseilles on his way to England, the next day; unless—which he thought unlikely—a telegram should arrive from England to detain him.

"You and the English squadron will depart almost together," said Barletti.

"Aye? The queen's ships are going away?"

"So I hear."

"Have you ever been over an English man-of-war?" asked Mr. Frost.

"No: I don't understand ships. When we were boys we used to go out sometimes from Capri, my brother and I, with an old fisherman. But I never cared about it."

"H'm!" grunted Mr. Frost, eyeing his companion aside. "I don't understand ships either; but a British man-of-war is a fine sight."

And the lawyer broke out into a little national boasting.

"Ah, you like it because you are proud of your fleet. I am not an Englishman and I should not be proud of it, you know," said Barletti, quietly.

"Look there!" exclaimed Mr. Frost, staring out to sea. "Do you see that boat putting off from the squadron? I think from the direction, she must be coming from the Furibond: but without a glass it is impossible to see the ships. How they pull, the blue-jackets! Just watch them. It's artistic. Strength, and the kind of grace that comes from strength skilfully used. See how they bend and rise, and how the oars all flash together. They are pulling for this nearest landing place."

Mr. Frost craned his head out of the window to watch. Barletti, too, rose and looked out. On came the trim boat manned by trim sailors. She seemed to scud over the sea like a living thing. As she drew near, they could see the dark blue uniform of an officer who was steering. And they began to make out also two other figures—a man and a woman.

"Visitors to the squadron, whom they're going to put ashore," said Mr. Frost.

The landing place to which the boat came was at a considerable distance from the hotel. They could not distinguish the features of the persons in the boat. But they saw a carriage which had been driving slowly up and down, come to a stop close by. Two servants descended from it, and half supported, half carried the gentleman who had been in the boat, into the vehicle. The lady followed, and they drove off. The ship's boat then was pulled back again towards the squadron, and swiftly diminished to a mere speck on the waters.

The carriage, however, passed close beneath the windows of the hotel, and Barletti gave a little exclamation as he recognised Paul seated on the box. The blinds of the carriage were down, and it was impossible to see its occupants; but Barletti had no doubt that they were Sir John Gale and Veronica.

"Tiens!" said Barletti. "I know those people who have just come from the Furieux—Furibon—what do you call it?"

Mr. Frost was looking at his watch. "I am sorry to turn you out," he said, "but I have an appointment with some of our directors at half past ten. It is a quarter past ten now. I must be off."

"Nay," replied Barletti, pulling out his own watch. "You are fast, I think. By my watch it is only five minutes past ten."

"Ah, you're wrong, prince. If minutes were as precious with you as they are with me, you would regulate your watch better. You reckon your time as rich men reckon their money—in large sums: and know nothing of small subdivisions. But mine is a working watch, a busy man's watch, right to a second. And I set it last night by railway time. Will you go first, or shall I lead the way?"

"Che diavolo!" muttered Barletti, following the lawyer down-stairs. "It didn't strike me at first, but now I think how early it is, what in the world could have brought him out at this hour in the morning!"

"Eh?" said Frost, half turning round on the staircase.

"Nothing. I was only wondering why my friends chose such an hour to visit the squadron."

"The gentleman seems to be an invalid."

"Yes: he is ill and regularly used up. I heard from his physician that his doom is fixed. He can't last much longer."

"Ah, indeed!" returned Frost, indifferently. His attention was more occupied in finding the hook in the hall marked twenty-seven, on which to hang the key of his room, than in listening to Barletti.

"He is very rich—one of your English millionaires. Perhaps you know the name—Baronet Sir John Gale."

"Gale! Tallis Gale?"

"Ah, you know him?"

"I know of him: and nothing to his credit. I'm sorry if he's your friend; but in England he bears a very bad character."

"Oh, I have no special love for him," answered Barletti. "I believe him to be a *roué* and a *vaurien*."

"He used that poor wife of his, infernally ill."

"Used her ill? The brute! I have suspected it."

"Oh, it's not a matter of suspicion. The story is well known enough. Well, I must be off. I may not see you again, prince. But I suppose our little affair is settled. Good-bye."

"Good-bye. You really start to-morrow? Well, bon voyage!"

Mr. Frost walked away briskly. Barletti remained in the doorway of the hotel. He stood there pondering with an unlit cigar in his hand; and was roused from a reverie by the consciousness that some one was behind him, wanting to pass out. He looked round and saw an officer in the uniform of the English navy.

"Pardon!" said the officer, raising his cap courteously. Barletti took off his hat.

The officer had moved away a few paces, when he stopped, came back, and said in French: "Excuse me, but are you staying in this hotel?"

"No. I came here merely to see a friend."

"Then you don't happen to know whether there is any one of that name here?" said the officer, showing a card with an English name on it. "The porter is very surly, or very stupid. I can make nothing of him. But I have an idea that my friend must be here, if I could but get at him."

Barletti good-naturedly went into the porter's little glass den and began to speak in voluble Neapolitan to a man who was doing duty there. He proved to be the porter's deputy; that chief functionary being absent temporarily from his post.

"If you don't mind waiting a few minutes," said Barletti, returning to the doorway, "the porter will be back. That fellow knows nothing; understands only two words of French, and won't confess his ignorance. I have rated him in the strongest vernacular."

The officer made his acknowledgments,

offered Barletti a light for his cigar, and waited beside him for the porter's return.

"You have had some friends of mine visiting the squadron this morning," said Barletti, glancing curiously at the square-jawed, smooth-shaven face of the sailor, who stood there with a certain massive imperturbability.

"Indeed? This morning?"

"Is your ship the *Furieux*?"

"The *Furibond*, yes. Do you mean that the lady and gentleman who were aboard the *Furibond* this morning, are friends of yours?"

"The gentleman is old and feeble?"

"Yes; not so very old, perhaps, but awfully shady and used up."

"The lady young and beautiful?"

"Magnificently handsome."

"Yes, yes. Oh, I know them well. I was surprised to see him out so early."

"I suppose he thought there was no time to be lost. Besides, it is customary with us to manage these matters so that they shall be over before twelve o'clock."

"Before twelve? I had no idea that that was a rule in your navy."

"Oh, not exclusively in the navy," answered the officer, smiling a little.

"How? I don't understand."

"Afloat or ashore, marriages take place with us before twelve at noon."

"Marriages!"

The amazement in Barletti's face was so deep and genuine that the officer stared in his turn.

"Did you not know?" he said. "I thought you told me that the bride and bridegroom were friends of yours?"

"The—the—bride and——? Oh, it must be a mistake. I was speaking of the lady and gentleman who were rowed ashore at that landing place, not a quarter of an hour ago, in a little boat."

"To be sure! I was steering. I am ashore on leave."

"He is an Englishman—a rich——"

"Sir John Gale."

"Sir John. And they were, you say——?"

"They were married by our chaplain. The old boy—the baronet, I mean—was not strong enough to take the journey to Florence, where they might have been married before the British minister. So, as he knows Captain Burr, he got him to allow the ceremony to take place aboard the *Furibond*. The young lady has the prospect of a speedy widowhood before her, it seems to me."

Barletti had felt like a man groping in a

mist. Now, the last words of the Englishman came like a sudden ray clearing the dim confusion. They suggested a pathway for his conjectures to follow: whereas, before, all had been blank and formless. His first and most imperative impulse was to get away and think of what he had heard, alone. He touched his hat hastily in farewell salutation to the officer, hailed an empty fiacre that was passing, and jumped into it.

The driver, with that penury of articulate speech, and abundance of gesticulation which characterises the lower Neapolitans, asked in dumb show which direction he was to drive in?

"Anywhere," said Barletti, throwing himself back on the seat. "To—to—the Villa Reale. Drive on till I stop you!"

SPORT IN THE WILDS OF UIST.

LEAVING Loch Boisdale to its melancholy stagnation, the little yacht *Tern** cruised northward along the Outer Hebrides, and, anchoring here and there, the travellers hunted fish, flesh, and fowl, through the Highland wilds. If the reader be a sportsman of the usual breed—serious, professional, perfect in training, a dead shot at any distance short of a hundred yards, and at any object, from a snipe to a buffalo—it is with no respectful feelings that he will hear of our undisciplined raids. We were three—the Wanderer, Hamish Shaw, and the dog Schneider, so christened in a fit of enthusiasm after seeing Mr. Jefferson's Rip Van Winkle. The Wanderer would have been a terrible fellow in the field if he had not been short-sighted, and in the habit of losing his spectacles. But he was at least terribly in earnest, and could contrive to hit a large object if he did not aim at it with any particular attempt to be accurate. Hamish Shaw was not great at flying game, but was mightily successful in sneaking up for close shots at unsuspecting and sitting conies, and his eye was as sharp as a backwoodsman's at picking up objects at a distance. The third member of the party, Schneider the dog, was of the gentler sex, wayward, wilful for the lack of careful training during her infancy, apt to take her own way in hunting matters, until brought to a due sense of decorum by a vigorous application of the switch. Though she could not point or set, she was a tolerable retriever,

* See ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, vol. ii., p. 569.

and few dogs of any kind could match her for long and steady labour in the water.

Now, it was the fixed determination of the Wanderer, on roaming again northward, once and for ever to prove his title to the hunter's badge, by killing, according to the requirements of the old Highland formula, a Red Deer, a Salmon, an Eagle, a Seal, and a wild Swan. The red deer, he knew, were certainly not numerous in Uist; but the system of stalking them places the possibilities strongly in favour of the hunter, who lies securely hidden, close to one of the paths the game is sure to take when driven by boatmen from the adjacent small islands where they feed. Salmon were plentiful in the brackish lochs communicating with the sea, and in some of the larger rivers. The lesser seals swarmed at all times, while during winter even the great Arctic monster brooded on Hysker, and played splashingly at leapfrog through the Sound of Harris. Here and there, hovering over the inaccessible peaks, poised the eagle, in all the glory of his freedom, while the ravens croaked jealously on the shadowy crags below. As for the hoopers, solitary specimens had been known to alight on the lonely lochans even during the sunny season, and in winter the huge migratants landed in swarms—no very difficult mark for the hunter's bullet or "swan-post."

But the Wanderer was not proud; he had an eye to lesser game, and being inoculated with the least bit of the naturalist's enthusiasm, longed greedily for additions to his museum. Wherefore the eider duck, and the merganser, and the little gallinule, and all the various tribes of sea-birds and land-birds, were carefully marked for addition to the list of specimens culled by that steadfast hand. Then there was the cabin-table to be catered for; and rapturously was it noted, therefore, that wild ducks and plovers, and moorfowl, and conies, were numerous in all the islands, and that the monster wild goose, a still more noble quarry, was breeding in seeming security in the hearts of all the greater moorland lochs.

These were the weapons: a Russian rifle, antiquated, time-worn, good alike with bullet and small shot; a double-barrel breech-loader, good for stopping smaller game on the hillsides; and a long shoulder duck gun, Big Benjamin by name, good for any or everything at a hundred yards, and certain, if loaded with the due amount of shot and powder, to stretch low the unwary shooter with its sharp recoil. Then

there was the rod, a slight thing, but clever and pliant, besides being very portable; and then there were the six or seven kinds of flies—the dark wild-drake's wing, with white tip, being found the finest for trout in all those waters. Besides these, there was the telescope, taken in preference to a binocular field-glass, as being at once more powerful and more sportsman-like; but voted a bore in the sequel, always getting lost if carried in the hands, and, slung over the shoulders by a strap, constantly dangling forward in the way of the gun when the shooter stooped, or suddenly loosening at the critical moment before firing, to scare the purposed victim away with a savage rattle!

Floating hither and thither, a light air guiding the punt surely though slowly towards the victims, we soon accumulated specimens of the two species of gool-ducks, the male and female eider, the black guillemot, the herring hawk, the black scart and green shag, and the calloo. All and each of these birds were roasted and tasted after the skinning, having determined to give a fair trial to every morsel that fell to rod or gun; the only eatable birds among them were the eiders, and to devour *them* with a relish would require an appetite. As for the scart, angels and ministers of grace defend us from that taste again! The rakings of the ship's greasiest pantry, the scrapings of the cook's foulest cullender, mingled with meat from the shambles and stinking fish from the sea, could not surpass that savour! Yet the fishermen praise it hugely, and devour it with greed. At St. Kilda, where the chief diet of the inhabitants consists of sea-fowl, and elsewhere over all the islands, the birds are prized as food exactly in proportion to their fishy and oily taste.

Of all common birds that fly, commend us to the curlew; for we are by no means of that tribe of sportsmen who like an easy prey, and in our eyes the more difficult the chase the more glorious the sport. The curlew has two noble qualities. Kept till the right minute, cooked to a turn, delicately basted, and served with sweet sauce, it equals any bird that flies, is more delicate than the grouse, richer than the partridge, and plumper than the snipe. Then, still better, it is without any exception whatever, the most difficult of all English birds to catch unawares, or to entice by any device within shooting distance. It knows better than yourself how far your gun can carry; and with how mocking and shrill a pipe it rises and wheels away, just as you flatter yourself

you are within gunshot! Poor will be your chance at the wild duck on the shore, if the whaup be near; for his sharp eye will spy you out, as you crawl forward face downward, and at his shrill warning, "whirr" will sound the wings of the quacking flock, as they rise far over your head, and you rise shaking off the dirt and cursing the tell-tale. When a band of curlews alight, be sure that not one avenue of approach is unguarded; look with a telescope, and mark the out-lying guards—one high up on a rock, another peering round the corner of a cliff, a third far up on the land, and a last straggler perhaps passing over your own head with a whistle to his brethren. In all our sporting experience we have known only one of these birds to have been shot sitting; and this one was slain on a hillside by Hamish Shaw, who held his gun between his teeth and crawled through the heather, on his stomach, like a snake.

The Wanderer and Hamish Shaw slew many a whaup in the fjörds at Boisdale. Nowhere in the Highlands were these birds so plentiful; they gathered in great flocks, literally darkening the sky; but nowhere, also, were they shyer and wilder. The most successful plan was to row the punt slowly to the spot where the birds thronged the rocks, with their heads and bodies all turned one way; and, when they arose screaming, to run the chance of picking off solitary individuals at long distances. It was found that the curlew always felt himself perfectly safe, flying at one hundred yards; and, with careful shooting and proper loading, Big Benjamin could do wonders at that distance at any tolerably-sized bird on the wing.

But what says the reader to the wild goose? A more noticeable fellow surely, and worthy of the sportsman's gun. Even far south in England, in severe weather, you have been startled by the loud "quack, quack, quack," above your head, and, looking upward, you have seen, far up in the air, the flock flying swiftly in the shape of a wedge, going God knows whither, with out-stretched necks in noble flight. The tame goose, the fat, waddling, splay-footed gosling, is an eyesore, a monstrosity fit only for the honours of onion-stuffing and apple-sauce at the Christmas season; but his wild kinsman is Hyperion to a satyr.

We had been storm-staid for a week in Loch Skifort, a lonely sea-fjörd about midway between Loch Boisdale and Loch Maddy, affording a snug anchorage in one of its numerous bays—MacCormack's Bay

by name. So wild were the squalls, for days, that we could not safely get on shore with the punt, although we were anchored scarcely two hundred yards from land. Now, by sheer blockheadedness, having calculated on reaching Loch Maddy and its shops at least a fortnight before, we had run short of nearly everything—bread, biscuits, sugar, tea, coffee, drink of all kinds; and but for a supply of eggs and milk, brought off at considerable peril from a lonely hut a mile away, we should have been in sore distress indeed. At last, the Wanderer and Hamish Shaw went off for a forage with guns and dog, determined, if all else failed, and they could not purchase supplies, to do justifiable murder on a helpless sheep. Though the wind was still high, they sailed up Loch Skifort with the punt and lugsail, and having reached the head of the loch, and drawn the boat up high and dry, they set off on foot with Big Benjamin and the double-barrel.

About five hundred yards distant, and communicating with Loch Skifort by a deep artificial trench, nearly passable by a boat at high tide, lies another smaller loch of brackish water, which in its turn communicates through reedy shallows with Loch Bee—a great lake reaching almost to the western ocean. Dean Monro, who visited the place long ago, speaks of Loch Bee as famous for its red mullet—"ane fish the size and shape of ane salmon;" and it still abounds in both fresh-water and ocean fishes:

For to this lake, by night and day,
The great Sea-water finds its way,
Through long, long windings of the hills,
And drinks up all the pretty rills,
And rivers large and strong.*

The loch was only about half a mile broad, so the sportsmen determined to separate, each taking one of the banks: Hamish Shaw shouldering Big Benjamin (which was heavily charged with the largest drop shot) and the Wanderer the double-barrel. The shores of the loch were boggy and covered with deep herbage, with great holes here and there as pitfalls to the unwary pedestrian. The Wanderer stumbled along for about a mile without seeing so much as the glint of a passing wing. At last, he perceived a small and desolate island, over which two black-backed gulls hovered, screaming at the sight of a stranger. From a corner of this island rose a duck, and sped swiftly, out of gunshot, down the water. The Wan-

* Wordsworth's Highland Boy.

derer waded, sure that it must wheel; wheel it did, after flying five hundred yards, and passed back close over his head. Down it came, plump as a stone. Alas! only a gool duck, with its buff breast and saw-toothed bill; and a mother too, for out from the weedy point of the island, diving in unconcern, paddled her five young, earning their own living already, though they were only wingless little lumps of down. The Wanderer bagged his bird disappointedly, for he had made sure of a mallard.

A shout from Hamish Shaw! He was pointing backward up the loch, and shouting out a sentence, of which only one word—"geese!"—was audible. The Wanderer crept stealthily to the water's edge, and espied a number of large birds seated on the water a quarter of a mile away. The telescope soon proving the blissful truth that these were indeed geese, it was hurriedly arranged in pantomime that Hamish should creep back and press the birds gently forward, without approaching so close as to compel them to rise: while the Wanderer, with his dog, crouched behind a rock on the water's edge, ready to slaughter the unwary ones as they swam past.

It was one of those periods of awful suspense known only to the man who shoots—the knees soaking in muddy weeds, the perspiration rolling down the cheeks; an unaccountable and fiercely resisted desire to sneeze suddenly taking possession of the nose; one eye, in an agony, glaring command on the dog, the other peering at the approaching game. And now, horror of horrors! it is beginning to drizzle. The spectacles get misted over every minute, and they are wiped with a hand that trembles like an aspen leaf. Suppose the rain should spoil the percussion cap, and the piece, at the last moment, refuse to go off? There they are, little more than a hundred yards away: a mighty gander, grey-headed and jaunty, leading the way, a female a few yards behind, then another gander and his wife, lastly, four fat young geese, nearly as big as their parents, but duller in their attire and far less curious in their scrutiny of surrounding objects. Hush! the first gander is abreast of us. We have to hold down the dog by main force. We do not fire, for our hearts are set on the young brood; they will be tender, and papa will be tough. Perdition! Schneider, driven to frenzy, and vainly trying to escape, utters a low and hideous whine; the old Ganders and geese start in horror; they flutter, splash, rise; and there

is barely time to take rapid aim at one young goose, just dragging itself into the air, when Schneider plunges into the water, and the whole portly covey are put to rout!

As the smoke of the gun clears away, one goose lies splashing on the surface, grievously wounded; him Schneider approaches to secure, but appalled by a hiss, a beat of the wings, a sudden sign of showing fight, turns off and would retreat ignominiously to shore. Dire is the language which the Wanderer hurls at her head, bitter are the reproaches, bitter the taunting reminiscences of other mishaps by flood and field; till at last, goaded by mingled shame and wrath, Schneider turns, showing her teeth, despatches the foe with one fell snap, and begins trailing him to shore. Meanwhile, the Wanderer hears a loud report in the distance, unmistakably the voice of Benjamin, adding to the list of slain.

Flushed with triumph (for at least one meal was secure) the Wanderer slung the spoil over his shoulder, patted the dog in forgiveness of all sins, and made his way over to the other side as rapidly as possible. Arrived there, he looked everywhere for Hamish, but saw no sign of that doughty Celt. At last his eye fell on something white lying among the heather; and lo! an aged gander, blood-stained, dead as a stone. Then, emerging from the deep herbage, rose the head of Shaw; a ghastly sight; his face all cut and covered with blood. An old story! Held in hands not well used to his ways, Big Benjamin had taken advantage of the occasion, and, uttering his diabolical roar, belching forward and kicking backward, had slain a gander and nearly murdered a man, at the same time.

A little water cleared away the signs of battle, but Hamish still rubbed his cheek and shoulder, vowing never to have any more dealings with such a gun as long as he lived. After a rest and a drop of water from the flask, tracks were made homeward, and, just as the gloaming was beginning, the fruit of the forage was triumphantly handed over to the cook on board the yacht.

Blessings do not come singly. By the side of the yacht, and nearly as big as herself, was a boat from shore, offering for sale new potatoes, fresh milk, and eggs. On board were a shepherd and his wife, who, living in an obscure bay of the loch, had only just heard of the yacht's arrival. The man was a little red-headed fellow, wiry and lissome; his wife might have passed for

a Spanish gipsy, with her straight and stately body, her dark fine features and glittering black eyes, and the coloured handkerchief finely setting off a complexion of tawny olive. Kindly and courteously, hearing that a "lady" was on board (there *was* a lady, reader!), they had brought, as a present for her, two beautiful birds—a young male kestrel and a young hooting owl, which from that day became members of the already too numerous household on board the Tern. The kestrel lives yet, rejoicing in the name of "Joseph:" a nautical bird, tame as possible, and never tired of swinging on a perch on the deck of a ship. But the owl, christened "The Chancellor," on account of his wig, disappeared one day overboard.

The shepherd was a mountaineer, and knew much of the ways and haunts of birds. He knew of only one pair of eagles in that neighbourhood, and from his vague description, translated to us by Hamish Shaw, we could not make out to what precise species of eagle he referred. He had harried the nest that spring, but the young had died in his hands, and he was afraid the old birds would forsake the mountain. In answer to our questions about sport, he said that the small lochans close by attracted a large number of birds, but if we wished a genuine day of wild-fowl hunting, we must go to Loch Phlogibech, two miles in the interior, where the geese were legion. He recommended us to get the punt carried across the hills—a feat which might speedily be achieved by the vigorous work of four strong men.

As it was still too windy next morning to think of lifting anchor and urging the yacht further on her journey up the open coast, the punt was taken to shore at an early hour by Hamish and the Wanderer; and an aged shepherd and his son, living in a cottage on the banks of the fjörd, were soon persuaded to assist in carrying it overland. It was warm work. The hills were steep and full of great holes between the heather, and all were sodden with rain which had fallen during the night. Fortunately, however, there intervened, between the sea and Loch Phlogibech, no fewer than four smaller lochs, over which the punt was rowed successively: thus reducing the land journey from two miles to little more than half a mile. And lovely indeed were these little lochans of the hills, nestling among the hollows, their water of an exquisite limpid brown, and the water-lilies floating thereon so thickly that the path of the boat seemed strewn

with flowers. Small trout leaped at intervals, leaving a ring of light that widened and died. From one little pool, no larger than a gentleman's average drawing-room, and appavelled in a many-coloured glory no upholsterer could equal, we startled a pair of beautiful black-throats; but the guns were empty, and the prize escaped. There were ducks also, and flappers numberless; stately herons, too, rising at our approach with a clumsy flap of the great black wings, and tumbling over and over in the air, when out of the reach of danger, in awkward and unwieldy play.

What is stiller than a heron on a promontory? Motionless he stands, arching his neck, and eyeing the water with a steadfast gaze. Hours pass: he has not stirred a feather; fish are scarce; but sooner or later, an eel will slip glittering past that very spot, and be secured by one thrust of the mighty bill. He will wait on, trusting to Providence, hungry though he is. Not until he espies your approach, does he change his attitude. Watchful, and yet still, he now stands sidelong, stretching out his long neck with a serpentine motion, till, unable to bear the suspense any longer, he rises into the air.

At last, all panting, we launched the punt on Phlogibech; and delicious indeed, at that moment, would have been a drop of distilled waters; but the last whisky bottle had been empty for days, and was not to be replenished in those regions. Having despatched the Highlanders homeward, with a promise from them to aid in the transport of the boat on the return journey next day, the Wanderer and his henchman loaded the guns and set off in search of more sport to be duly recorded.

THE TROTHPLIGHT.

CRIMSON red behind the hill,
Day was sinking slowly,
Hushedly the wild birds sang
Notes of melancholy.
Homeward from a bootless quest,
Went the wild bee humming;
Earth was weary, day was done,
And the night was coming.

Sadly thro' the greenwood way
Walked a youth and maiden,
Looking in each other's eyes,
Fond and sorrow laden.
"Rudolf, now thy country calls
And our lives are parted:
Be thou brave—but keep thy troth,
And be constant hearted."

Of the gleaming golden hair,
One bright lock she sunders;
Day is dying, far away
Sound the battle thunders.

"Fare thee well, mine own true love;
Where our flag is flying,
I shall bear thy lock of hair,
Faithful unto dying."

Far away the thunder sounds:
Swiftly speeds the lover,
Wild and loud the days go by
Till the strife is over.
Red and bloody gleams the sun
Over dead and dying,
Sick to death upon the field
See the lover lying!

To a comrade dear, he cries,
"Truest friend and nearest,
Bear this lock of bloody hair
To her my heart holds dearest.
Bertha! We shall meet again
Where the true part never,
Bertha!" then his eyes grew dark,
And were closed for ever.

Home to Bertha hied the friend,
Found her wild with weeping;
"Bertha, was his latest word
Ere he sank to sleeping."
"I shall follow him full soon,
Whom I loved so blindly;"
Then she met his comrade's eyes,
And she thought them kindly.

"Comfort! comfort! do not die!
Thou art fair and youthful!"
Once again she met his eyes,
And she thought them truthful.
Smiling shily stood at hand,
Love, the flaxen headed;
When, for her dear Rudolf's sake,
She his comrade wedded!

THE GLENGILLODRAM CATTLE SHOW.

It is not the great annual gathering of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, nor that of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland, that I intend to describe. My task shall be the humbler one of introducing the reader to the yearly doings of a parish Agricultural Society in the far north of Scotland, when its members are met to exhibit their stock. But let it not be supposed that my parish society is an unimportant institution, considered by itself, or in relation to its place in the framework of British "interests." For if we single out the three counties of Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray, in the region of which I have just spoken, we shall find that the great metropolis of England draws from thence a surprisingly large proportion of the finest fat beeves that are week by week sold at Islington. And it is at the parish cattle show that those very beeves, which will by-and-bye come up to London at Christmas in scores and hundreds, with glossy sides shaking with fat, are first drawn out and pitted against each other for the honours of the prize list.

Here, then, on a fine summer day, the young oxen, cows, and heifers are being driven from all quarters of the Glen, in groups of three, four, five, six, and eight, with here and there a refractory animal tugged and pushed along with a rope halter over its head. And the bulls have the distinction of wearing each a ring in his nose, and of having each a special attendant to himself. They converge towards a large open field of stunted grass, with heather and broom about its margin. In the lower part are sundry wooden and canvas booths, the occupants of which profess to supply "refreshment for man and beast," and about these we find a miscellaneous gathering of horses, sheep-dogs, and vehicles of various descriptions.

The cattle have passed on a little further, and my friend drags me forward to see them; for, he adds, "The judging has begun." We go on toward the upper part of the field, which is a scene of rather uncomfortable liveliness by reason of the number of animals congregated there—about two hundred, I am told; and, as every farmer endeavours to keep his own small group separate from all the others, the amount of shouting, bellowing, and spasmodic running hither and thither of men and cattle is immense. They have just driven about a dozen animals into a sort of double pen. These I learn are the "two-year-old heifers," which are about to come under the judges' inspection. The space inside the ring is appropriated to the cattle whose merits are under adjudication, the judges, and a few other official, or privileged, persons. Hanging on by, and outside of, the fence are a good many scores of spectators, all deeply interested, evidently, in the awards of the judges. These same judges are three shrewd-looking men, farmers or cattle-dealers, but not men of the parish, lest their decisions should be partial. Along with them are a rustic clerk, to record their "findings," and two or three men with sticks, punching about the cattle for the convenience of the judges. And inside the fence, too, coming and going, are various gentlemen of consideration in the place, one or two of them dressed in the Highland garb. The judges seem to do their work conscientiously. First, they give a brief glance at the lot in general; then they pick out and put to one side a number of the best; next, they compare the "points" of these, turn them round and round for careful scrutiny, and anon draw aside to consult together.

At last the order of prizes is called out, and jotted down by the clerk; the gate is opened, and the two-year-old heifers are driven out, to be succeeded in the pen by the "one-year-old heifers," gathered from different parts of the field with no little noise and scampering. And so it is with the "two-year-old stots," the "one-year-old stots," and various other classes. I have no doubt the judges do their work with thorough knowledge and impartiality, as indeed the dozens of amateur judges around me seem ready to admit, though I am too great a novice to be able to discern with any approach to exactitude the grounds of their various awards. I do not know that in this I am entirely singular either: for here when a new lot is driven into the pen, I overhear one of the kilted gentlemen—the greatest laird in the parish, who smokes a clay cutty, chats familiarly with his tenants, and seems to take a lively interest in all that is going on—directing the very favourable attention of the judges to a showy-looking, speckled cow as an animal of extraordinary merit. These hard-headed gentlemen simply smile an unbelieving smile; and I watch how they will deal with this particular animal, which seems to me also a beast of uncommon merit, judging by her giraffe-like height, and the beautiful speckling all over her body. Alas, for amateur opinion, they are not even at the trouble to turn her aside for a moment's inspection; and though the stentorian attendant calls out six or seven prizes to cows, the speckled cow is not admitted to even the lowest place in the list!

After all the "general classes" have been gone over there comes a special competition. There are a couple of silver "challenge cups" to be competed for; one for the "best male," the other for the "best female breeding animal on the ground." And here both the interest and excitement awakened by the day's proceedings culminate. The man who would make the challenge cup his own must take it three years running against all competitors; and the difficult nature of this feat finds illustration in the fact that nobody has ever yet succeeded in accomplishing it. On the present occasion, I can perceive, the competition runs some risk of tending to a war of races. For the male cup a selection of bulls, old and young, pawing the earth and breathing forth threatenings and slaughter against each other, are brought into the ring; and, after much consultation, a young but, as one can understand, very hand-

some short-horned bull is declared entitled to the high award; whereupon sundry of the amateur judges around me mutter very audible doubts about the equity of the decision. The region in which we are is rather famous for the production of that variety of the bovine race known as "black polled," which, when fully "finished," stand at the very top of the London butchers' price-lists under the title of "prime Scots." And the idea that any other than a black-polled animal should carry off one of the chief honours of the day does not command the popular sympathy. However the equilibrium of feeling is pretty well restored when it is announced that the cup for females has been carried off easily from a large lot of competitors of divers breeds by a polled cow of "uncommon sweetness," as my friend assures me.

The "labours of the field" fairly over, and certain adjustments about payment of prize-money made, the next part of the day's proceedings is the dinner, which takes place in the largest of the canvas booths already spoken of, the inn, near by, not affording accommodation for a company of sixty to seventy, such as is now assembled. The kilted laird is chairman; his vice, or "croupier" is a very hale-looking man of Herculean build, not under seventy years of age; and who from the designation I hear applied to him on all hands of the "el'er," I understand to be a representative within the parish of the lay element in the presbyterian kirk.

On the chairman's right sits the parson of the parish; a comfortable, sedate-looking man, with ruddy cheeks and bald head, who has not deemed it beneath his dignity to enter the lists with his parishioners, and has honourably gained two or three prizes at the show. To the left of the chairman are the judges; and the rest of the company take their places without any regard to precedence. The toast list, as one discovers by-and-by, is a paper of portentous length, enumerating well nigh thirty separate "sentiments" from "The Queen" downward; but luckily the speeches are brief; for when the gentlemen of the Glengillodram Agricultural Society get on their legs their otherwise copious power of talk seems notably to desert them. The one really set or effective speech is when, in reply to the toast of "The Clergy and the Rev. Dr. Bluebell," the Rev. Dr. Bluebell proceeds to vindicate the propriety of his appearance there and then, amongst his parishioners; and how it becomes a true

pastor to be interested in all that concerns the prosperity of his flock, to illustrate and make clear the truth that they, the natural, and he and his order, the spiritual, husbandmen, are united by a common nature, common sympathies, and common wants, and thus are bound to seek each other's welfare in every possible way. The elder, as his present office demands of him to do, cries "Hear, hear," and the company cry "Hear, hear," and applaud the Rev. Dr. Bluebell loudly. When the chairman toasts "The Judges," they applaud again; when he toasts "The Successful Competitors" they also applaud; and when he toasts "The Unsuccessful Competitors" they applaud, if possible, yet more lustily. And it is observable that at every succeeding pause between the toasts, the general hum of conversation is getting louder and louder, and more and more animated.

Then the silver challenge cups are brought in, and with due ceremony presented by the chairman to the winners, who turn out to be no other than the elder, and a remarkably jolly-looking farmer from the upper part of the Glen, with a big red nose, and clad in a suit of "hadden grey." The chairman is now evidently getting tired of speech-making; and he begs to inform the company that when the Rev. Dr. Bluebell has given a toast he will call on the croupier for a song. The parson rises, and after a somewhat prosy and meaningless exordium, as it seems to me, proceeds to propose as his toast "The Strangers Present." And, adds the Rev. Doctor, to my unspeakable amazement and horror, "let me join with the toast the name of a gentleman, with whom I have not the pleasure of personal acquaintance—a representative of the small ware and pearl button department of trade, I understand—Mr. Simon Jellycod, your health, sir." All eyes are directed towards me, some dozens of broad good-natured countenances grin at me, as many shaggy heads nod over me; and it is a positive relief when one burly fellow, rather more than half seas over, fraternally seizes my hand with a hiccuped "Gi'es your neive, min," as they madly "hip-hip-hurrah," all round. How I manage to get to my feet, and actually to speak for full five minutes, as my guide, philosopher, and friend afterwards assures me, I do, remains to me still a complete mystery.

My speech, like all things human, takes end at last and somehow; and then comes the elder's song; which as it has in it a touch of the spirit of the old Scottish lyric,

and to me at least is quite new, I here reproduce:

BONNY BALCAIRN.

There lives an auld man at the back o' yon knowes,
His legs are nae better nor auld owsen bows,
It would set him far better to be herdin' his yowes,
Than takin' the tackie o' bonny Balcairn.

Whilk o' ye lasses will gang to Balcairn,
Oh whilk o' ye lasses will gang to Balcairn,
Oh whilk o' ye lasses will gang to Balcairn.
To be the good wife o' bonny Balcairn.

I'm nae for the lass that has naething ava,
Nor yet for the lassie that speaks for it a',
Nor yet for the lassie that gins an' flytes,
An' blames her goodman fan its a' her ain wytes,
Whilk o' ye lasses, &c.

I'm nae for the lass wi' the bonny black locks,
Nor yet for the lass wi' the braw ribbon knots,
But I'm for the lass wi' the bonny bank notes,
They will help wi' the tackie o' bonny Balcairn.
Whilk o' ye lasses, &c.

"Oh mither I'm gaen to Laurence fair."
"Daft laddie fat are ye gaen to dee there?"
"I'm gaen to buy some harrows an' plows,
To streek a bit pleuchie on Balcairn's knowes."
Whilk o' ye lasses, &c.

"Oh mither I'm gaen to Laurence fair."
"Daft lassie fat are ye gaen to dee there?"
"I'm gaen to buy some ribbons and lawn,
To wear on my head fan I get the Goodman.
For I am the lassie that's gaen to Balcairn,
I am the lassie that's gaen to Balcairn,
Although the auld man be a silly concern,
It's a canty bit tackie the tack o' Balcairn."

"Your health an' song, el'er"—"your health an' song," alternate with shouts of applause when the song terminates. Then the Rev. Dr. Bluebell and a few of the straiter sort in the company leave; then we have one or two more attempts at toast-giving and song-singing. But the company are getting gradually more uproarious and less manageable, till at last the chairman sternly calls for "order," to allow of his finishing the toast list, which is done by drinking to "A Good Harvest."

The company have now dispersed, as I innocently suppose, and my friend and I are setting out for his home, when the elder seizes him by the arm, and says, "Hoot, ye're nae gaen awa wi' the gentleman till he see the cups christen't." It is in vain to urge that I have seen, perhaps, quite enough of the convivialities of the place for the time. We are pulled away toward the inn, and on our way thither the elder seems to be mustering his friends to take part in the ceremony that is about to follow, whatever it may be. Of that we are not left long in doubt. On entering mine host's largest parlour, which is evidently set out for the occasion, there stand the two veritable challenge cups—silver

cups of ample size, though not of the highest finish—at the top of the table, and beside them a goodly array of bottles corked and sealed. Gradually a company of about half the number of that which has just broken up has assembled. That the proceedings are to be more of the free-and-easy order than those that have gone before is testified by the fact that the greater part of those who come in enter the room smoking their pipes; and in this particular the chairman, who is none other than the worthy laird who had officiated in that capacity just before, is no exception. When he has got us all seated, and the elder installed in his former office, Boniface is ordered to draw the corks of the eight bottles of—it is no slander to say it—very ordinary port that grace the top of the table. The liquor, it is understood, has been, or will be, paid for by the winners of the cups; and it has got to be drunk out of the challenge cups, handed round the table among the company. Here there is no toasting, and no particular order to be observed in anything; only the cups have to be filled and emptied; so much does the rite of christening render imperative. And in due course they are emptied, amid infinite noise of speeches and songs, tobacco smoke, and incoherent talk about cattle and cattle breeding, and many things relating thereto, to me very unintelligible. The indifferent port seems to tell more rapidly on the bulk of the company than the whisky-punch imbibed at our previous sitting had done. No doubt the two hours we have spent over the national compound have done their part in helping to mellow all our hearts; but I rather think the general sentiment of the company is expressed by the red-nosed cup-man, when, as the result of an abortive effort to stand in equilibrio, he declares that, “that sour dirt o’ wine’s nae like gude honest whisky; it’ll turn a man’s head afore he’s half gate on.” How many are tipsy at the close of the christening, which takes place about half-past ten o’clock, I will not venture to guess. The chairman, who has proved himself, as he is on all hands declared to be, a jolly good fellow, certainly is not. Neither is the strong-headed old elder, for, as we are breaking up, with considerably more noise than haste, he tucks his challenge cup under his arm, and marches sturdily out. The ostler has his pony at the door, the elder mounts with a ponderous swing, shouts “Good-nicht, boys!” and in three minutes thereafter we can hear only the

receding footfalls of his nag, half a mile off, as he clatters on his homeward way in the grey gloamin’ light.

PHYSIOGNOMY OF LUGGAGE.

THERE is a physiognomy in the human back, the wave of the rim of a hat, the height of a shirt-collar, by which a man may be recognised quite as well as by his beaming face. The ignoring of this familiar truth, for a purpose, was singularly illustrated in the RUSH trial, when the endeavour was made to shake the maid-servant’s identification of that murderer, because she had only seen his back. Yet we do not remember that the learned judge or anybody else asked the jury to consider whether, in their daily experience, they were accustomed to know people by their backs as well as by their faces.

To know such a man’s walk, the shape of such an other man’s back, &c., seems to belong to a specially acute and Indian-like instinct: while sailors, in refutation of that meagre sense, which excuses some failure of recognition by such a pretence as “I could not see his face,” talk airily, and with a metaphor drawn from their own profession, of knowing some unfamiliar figure “by the cut of his jib.” These loose expressions all point to a deeper principle: to the curious marks which the interior soul leaves behind it, wherever it comes in contact with earthy matter, or earthy manners and modes. It all comes under the head of style, which, we have been told, “makes the man.” Tell us a particular style, and we shall know the man. And in dearth of all other helps and tokens show us a man’s trunk, and we may be pretty sure as to what he is.

Standing on the wooden pier at Folkestone, watching the sole dramatic show of the place, the departing packet, there is no moment so exciting for the jaded voluptuaries of the place as when the three or four great vans are seen rolling down along the rails. These huge trains hold the baggage of the great caravan, and each is halted by a yawning cavity in the pier, down which slopes, at an easy angle, a sort of Montagne Russe. Open fly the waggon doors, sailors and porters swarm round like bees at a hive’s mouth, and fling themselves on the baggage warehoused within. This rattles on the ground with hollow thump and sharp clash of hasps and handles, while a skilful

arm launches each on a headlong flight down the smooth inclined plane. There the philosopher, curious in the studies just alluded to, will see a most curious panorama, and discover with wonder, in how many shapes the human soul will fashion for itself an abstract ideal of the notion, TRUNK.

Something that will conveniently and securely hold the articles you bring with you; that is the aim. Not a very complex one. Yet the world seems to have run riot in fanciful devices. Mere varieties of size would be intelligible—some requiring larger, some smaller space, according to the amount of their property—but the vagaries and devices that go flying down in wild chase of each other seem incomprehensible.

So characteristic are these marks and tokens that, after a few weeks' training, the observer could almost sort them off, each to its proper owner. Here comes a huge family of trunks and cases, bright and dandified, bran new, tall, gay; ladies' trunks, covered like the roof of a house, of a clear new drab, with metal corners, the pure yellow strappings without a soil; new portmanteaus, in black shiny cases, and name in white letters; charming bags, with more strappings; and clean hat-cases. We look to the deck of the vessel, and see a tall, fat, grey father, in a white coat, surrounded by happy daughters, who are smiling on every one, looking out with delight on the sea, impatient to be off: and we know that this is their first voyage to foreign parts. In three months those brilliant trunks will return bruised, battered, smirched veterans of the campaign. The family have spent days in the delightful packing, in the fitting on of holland paletots, and getting "Mary" to sew on little bows of braid (clever device!), by which papa could recognise his own luggage at a glance, and secure it when other benighted travellers were wildly searching for their own. Before two days this sweet delusion is dispelled, and the gay millinery quite thrown away. Again, down come great, covered black chests, huge mourning leather-covered baskets, stout, frayed, abraded, worn, but with an air of service and business: five of these huge locomotive wardrobes together, and a glance at the deck, show us their owners, the handsome showy mamma, with her less showy daughter, habituées at Homburg, and once more bound for that pleasant seat of pleasure. Dozens of robes, long and short, repose in these tabernacles, and will glitter magnifi-

cently at the Kursaal and on the promenade. Each case has almost paid as much as a first-class passenger.

See those not over picturesque leather trunks, with quite a Mexican air, so "knobbed" over are they with brass. There is an art in them, to which our English and French workmen have not yet reached. They are American, and are stored with the finery of New York and Paris: they are strong, handsome, heavy; and the sums that an American father has to pay on a tour for these tremendous cases is something terrible. It is, indeed, surprising how the tall, heavy, wooden chests still obtain, and that ladies with huge armouries of apparel do not prefer the lighter baskets. Those who watch the rough and barbarous shifting of luggage abroad, have only to note the special crash with which such a chest is allowed to descend upon the platform, and guess at the weight of the case, which adds some pounds to the bill at the end of the journey. See that pluffy, rusty, rubbed, old, black-leather portmanteau, thickly covered as a bit of old dead wall with the scraps and strays of old luggage labels, with patches and corners of "Paris," "Geneva," "Rome," "Charing-cross," "Marseilles," and fifty other places—the despair of porters, who, in weariness, have given up tearing them off. That faithful old receptacle has done its thousands and thousands of miles, and it is easy to know its master—the imperishable bachelor growing elderly, a sybarite, who sensibly paid a handsome sum for it when new, as a good article that was to last him for life. He can be picked out readily on the deck, in a faded check cap, reading his newspaper, careless of the flurry about him, as much at home as in his club. He would not exchange his worn, plethoric, and corpulent old companion for a new one; he knows its ways and corners, and he fancies it knows him. To it and to a battered old hat-case, also registered and spun down the plane contemptuously, as though it were a ball, he feels affectionately, as though they were dogs; and the trio will wag on comfortably together till the day or night when their old master gives up his ghost in a lonely lodging in Bury-street, St. James's, and the old portmanteau is given away, or goes up-stairs to a lumber-room, where it will lie twenty years in dust until sold or stolen.

Here comes a single new, glossy black basket-trunk, with its attendant port-

manteau in canvas: bride and bridegroom. On the deck *they* may be seen, sitting together, he, like his trunk, in a white coat also. We know the French boxes at a glance—those queer little cases that seem made of cardboard or papier-maché, and open like a backgammon-board. They are of a strange size, made too small, and yet too large, with a view of being smuggled into a railway carriage, laid like boulders on the ground to be stumbled over by human legs, or else poised over head among the netting. The French hat-case, too, of a grey canvas, and shaped like a flower-pot, is an eccentric device; but one would hardly guess the strange shapes of luggage that come tumbling down. Very often we see the old-fashioned valise, such as is pillaged on the stage by brigands, and which has the air of a tinker's wallet. Now, glides down lazily the old, old hair-trunk, long and lean, mean and "mangy," unpleasant to look at, and invariably tied up in an old rope, with a big knot. Now, comes the covered tin box, having a lawyer-like air, suggesting deeds and leases, and which ought to have the owner's name on its side in large yellow letters. These small tin cases are growing into a sort of popularity, as light and neater looking than the "basket," and as more secure against damp. Now, comes the old "trunk" proper, a heavy chest, brass-nailed, with the initials of the owner rendered in the same glittering medium. Now comes the mouldy carpet-bag—of genuine carpet, as its name professes: not leathern, as the pseudo-things of our time exhibit themselves. They bend incoherently, like a person with weak knees. Into the notion of a pure carpet-bag of the old genuine pattern, enters something of the degrading. It seems to come of the pattern always running in stripes, or from the handles, suggesting the notion that is to be *carried* ignobly by the owner himself, a cheap and undignified saving of portorage. In the association there is something plebeian: as any one will find out speedily who chooses to test it by the gauge of a landlord's appreciation.

The English and foreign systems of dealing with luggage are very different. With the former the theory still is, that the man and his luggage are one. They are inclined to be tender with baggage. There is a laxity and *laissez faire* in this view of the matter. The foreigners, on the contrary, are jealous, and even ferocious. They would seem to be more indulgent even in

the case of a passenger. Every traveller recalls the scene at the "gare" a few minutes before the train is starting—the wild confusion, the stalwart men in blue, with brass on their caps, who haul about the great chests and frantically hoist them upon the low counters; the confused miscellany of travellers' trunks, the shouting, bumping, swearing, clattering, shuffling. Yet this is all about the weighing of luggage. When the postulant's turn is come, his chests are swung upon the scale, some strange gutturals are shouted to a pigeon-hole, whence comes a daubed shred of paper, with a demand for a large sum of francs. The gutturally mentioned weight may be anything; the rate of charge may be anything; but for his baggage the traveller pays heavily, and mysteriously, and "through the nose." It is not too much to say that what takes place in the baggage offices all over the Continent is an organised system of cheating. The confusion, ignorance of the language, hurry, eagerness, and bewilderment, are too tempting. No one is told what the weight is, but accepts what is told him, and is delighted to be gone. When we detect the ticket-clerk constantly trying to swindle—and the present writer was able to check some three attempts during a short tour in this year—the luggage, with superior advantages, is certain not to be above the temptation. All this is a scandal to foreign "administrations," especially on the French lines, where the favourite device is to add about ten francs to the charge for a set of tickets taken together. The flurried father of a family cannot make the "addition," pours the change he has received into his pocket with other change, and never learns the extent to which he has been cheated.

The speculation naturally arises whether this charge for luggage, so thoroughly developed on the Continent, is a legitimate one. And whether the passenger who pays his fare should not be allowed the privilege of having his trunk carried for him. The companies may say that they cannot be expected to find vans and porters for those vast heaps of chests and trunks gratuitously; which seems reasonable enough. But this is a fallacy. Two vans at most accompany a long express train of fifteen carriages; so the proportion of passenger luggage to passenger accommodation is very slight. The portorage, booking, wear and tear, and so forth, would be covered by a very small charge or per-centage: a mere nothing as compared with a passenger fare.

It may be questioned, too, whether the foreign companies do not lose as much in one way as they gain in another; for their oppressive charges must act as a heavy duty, and discourage travellers who would otherwise travel. The English principle, on the whole, seems the most equitable, which allows a certain laxity, and only interferes when there is an excessive and unreasonable quantity of baggage.

Ladies, indeed, are terrible offenders in this way, as hundreds of husbands, brothers, and fathers, can testify. The leading principle they lay down is to take *all* their worldly effects with them; every abatement which they make to the force of necessity is so much gracious and generous concession. Abroad, say at some pleasant Rhine station, the truck piled with the luggage of the travelling family, watched over by "the man," is a sight to see. The monstrous and heavy chests, some five or six; papa's and George's modest portmanteaus; the dozen small square boxes, which "do not count," and contain, Heaven knows what! the dressing-cases, the parcels, the half-dozen dressing-bags, each holding as much as, and far heavier than, a carpet-bag; the three or four bundles of cloaks, shawls, great coats, oil-skin waterproofs, with, finally, the lictors' fascies of sticks, umbrellas, parasols, alpenstocks, firmly bound together, this mass of effects is bewildering, not to say disheartening, and must embitter the pleasures of travelling. The mere getting such things to an hotel, the distribution through rooms, the unpacking and packing, the nervous duty of keeping them all together, and losing nothing, must make the most delightful of pleasures a most disagreeable task. And, it may be said, there is a great art in packing, or in the distribution of things. For the true secret of happiness, in baggage, is to put immediate necessities apart in a small and handy receptacle; so that the great case may be dealt with as a reserve, and left in sulky majesty at the railway depôt, while the light and handy case goes off gaily to the hotel. The inconvenience of dragging these great chests to hotels for a night, or half a day, is not to be conceived. They become, at last, as odious as the monster was to Frankenstein. But the skilled traveller knows all these moves.

For the gentleman traveller there is nothing in the wide world so handy or convenient as the old valise, of an expanding sort, and chosen with great nicety as to its size; not too large, or it becomes a

portmanteau in all but name; not too small, or it becomes a sort of hand-bag. In the happy mean lies the art. If your choice be good, it is a vast blessing. It never separates from you, it goes in the same carriage with you everywhere. It should have a spring lock, so as to open quickly, and shut smartly. Custom House officers give you the preference; while the other victims are waiting for their great chests to be set in order, you leave the station triumphantly, a porter carrying the modest equipage, and you are the better for the little walk. But here a voice is heard pleading for what has these advantages to an infinitely greater degree, the knapsack. Its owner too, is not delayed, and hoists it on his shoulder. But there is a sacrifice of respect in it, there is something shabby and even mean; every knapsack bearer, unless the most case-hardened, has a qualm as he walks, or skulks up, with his poor kit to the good hotel in the large town. They are shy of him and of his fellows, and of that queer uniform he wears, that plaited thing with a belt, which he is so proud of. Where there is room, they give it to him grudgingly; when there is competition for room, he and his wallet have no chance. Not so with the owner of the genteel black valise, which the owner does not carry on his back.

After all, the American system might be worth a trial here, modified, of course; for in that country they have great lengths of railway, rather than the confused network of lines that is among us. It is always pleasant when, by some lucky chance, you arrive at an hotel, to find your trunks awaiting you with an air of welcome. How much more agreeable if this were reduced to a system. It is surprising that some authorised agent, for whom a railway company would be responsible, should not attend as an experiment, collect the numbers of trunks and cases from such as are willing to try the experiment, and leave all at the various houses. The sixpences or shillings now given to porters might be better spent in remunerating such a useful friend, and the present state of scramble would be abolished. It is wonderful how, with the existing inviting opportunities, a regular organised system of plunder has not been set on foot. A timorous passenger, even though he saw some one carrying off what seemed to be his trunk, might hesitate to claim it, through fear of mistake—trunks and portmanteaus being so like each other.

The cost in cabs and carriages is prodigious; whereas abroad there is always a porter service, with light hand-carts, immensely used. We might learn something from the invaluable aid of the Swiss post-office, where trunks are taken like letters, and forwarded like letters, all over the country. Here, the theory seems to be that a passenger may not be divorced from his baggage; or that once separated from him it must go wandering about helplessly, get strayed or stolen, with no one to look after it. All these matters require reform.

SISTER X'S CONVENT LIFE.*

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

PUBLISHED "impressions" and autobiographies possess two distinct kinds of value. The first lies in the truthfulness of their portraiture, the second in the skill of their literary workmanship. The two combined would give a perfect sample of memoir writing. The original of the following narrative has the former merit, but is greatly deficient in the latter. All the personages are individualities, unmistakably drawn from life. They are human, made of flesh and blood, very thinly covered with a monastic crust. There are no conventional, melodramatic monks and nuns, black or white to the backbone, and demoniacal or angelic without comprehensible motive, and solely for badness' or goodness' sake. On the contrary, you feel that, were you frocked or veiled, you might be brought to do even as they did.

Some people, however, cannot tell their own tale, and Sister X.—if it be a sister, and not an editor or an amanuensis—is one of these. She is diffuse, unmethodical, in her story; she omits trifles essential to clearness, as if you knew as much about the matter as herself. Moreover, there is a duchesse who has a family interest in forcing her to take vows of celibacy; and there is a scene of hoccussing by opium, to get her to sign away, in favour of the convent, a thumping legacy, of which she had been kept in ignorance. These, skilfully told, might improve the drama, although they in no way complete the picture. We therefore omit them, producing merely a condensed summary of parts of the narrative, and referring the reader who is curious to learn more to the original, published by M. De-george-Cadot, Paris.

* See *Those Convent Belles, ALL THE YEAR ROUND*, New Series, vol. i. p. 445.

Sister X. was the only child of an officer in the army named Soubeyran, who had lost a leg in his country's service, and who had a small pension and the brevet of an officer in the Legion of Honour. These scanty resources were further eked out by an appointment to a receivership of taxes at St. Marceau, a large market-town in the Orléanais. Her mother was quiet, almost austere, in her ways, speaking little, and occupying herself with her household affairs without fuss or ostentation.

At the age of fifteen Sister X. was affianced to a young officer of great promise, of Alsatian origin, named George Sturm, the son of one of her father's companions in arms. He was a Protestant in faith, of middle stature, strongly built, fair-haired as a thoroughbred German, with large blue eyes, quiet and gentle in all his ways. On his betrothed completing her nineteenth year, George so wearied her parents with his importunities, that a speedy marriage was agreed to. His regiment was then in garrison only twenty leagues from St. Marceau. The lady's father and their friend the aged curé would have dispensed with the formalities of the trousseau, and other matrimonial preliminaries. Her mother, perhaps in consequence of economical considerations, as well as her unwillingness to part with her daughter, succeeded in putting off the event for several months. This delay was fatal. In consequence of an insurrection in Algeria, George was suddenly obliged to leave without being able to bid his friends adieu.

The good old curé of St. Marceau died. He was succeeded by a young priest, the Abbé Desherbiers, not more than thirty years of age, sent from another diocese at the instance of a wealthy family in the neighbourhood. Soon after his installation, there came to St. Marceau, in search of a dwelling, a demoiselle Dufougeray, a sort of adventuress, unknown to everybody, and to the new curé himself, as he pretended. She was a strange personage, who must have been more than forty years of age, but who did her best to disguise the ravages of time. She fixed her residence at St. Marceau.

Mademoiselle Dufougeray soon made acquaintance with the curé, and forced herself into the house of the receiver of taxes, whether he would or not. Naturally Mademoiselle Soubeyran went to confession to the Abbé Desherbiers, as she had gone to his predecessor; and he so thoroughly acquired her confidence as gradually to

suppress in her mind every sentiment of filial affection. He poisoned her mind against poor George, and persuaded her that her parents had sacrificed her real interests to their own caprice. By degrees, he brought her to be disgusted with everything. From this disgust to the wish to enter a cloister, there is only one step. It was very soon made. Mademoiselle Dufougeray did her best to back up the pastor's intrigues. Mademoiselle Soubeyran had no idea what a convent was like. The two worthy servants of God contrived the means of enabling her to visit one without her parents' knowledge.

She saw the convent and had been expected. The nuns played their part to perfection. Nothing but happiness met the eye; nothing struck the ear but angelic benedictions; every countenance beamed with a smile. Thanks to this visit and the eloquence of a famous preacher then in the neighbourhood, the young lady's imagination became excited, and she determined to break every link which chained her to the world. Nevertheless, she feared her father's violence and her mother's cold but firm resistance. At first they would not believe her to be serious, but when she insisted, and talked of sending back to George her engagement ring, the father, who had other causes of complaint against the curé, could not contain his anger.

The Abbé Desherbiers was no longer received at the captain's house, La Tour, but his female confederate, by feigning to share the parents' displeasure, contrived to maintain her footing in the house, and favoured an active correspondence between him and his pupil. This correspondence, combined with the parental resistance, confirmed the mischief. Secular parents little know how much they help the confessor to play his game by stern opposition to their daughters' religious fancies, which only confirms their high-flown notions; whereas, when the rein is wisely slackened, vocations sprung from excitement rarely last. In this case, the abbé convinced the girl that she was "oppressed," "the victim of tyranny," and so forth, and advised her to discontinue every kind of contest, and patiently to await the day of her majority.

On the 11th of September, 185—, the limit which the law prescribes to parental authority was passed. Half crazed by excitement and perfidious counsels, Mademoiselle Soubeyran longed for an opportunity to throw off the yoke. In the pretended impossibility of obtaining her parents' con-

sent, the Abbé Desherbiers urged her to leave them secretly, suggesting that she could afterwards ask their pardon. He learned that, on the second of November, the father would leave home to collect government dues; and he arranged that one of his confidantes, a Madame R., should wait for the girl at nightfall, with a carriage, half a mile outside the town.

"How that terrible day passed," Sister X. says, "it is out of my power to tell. Agitated by contradictory thoughts, I instinctively shrunk from taking a step of which hereafter I might repent, and I almost wished that some accident, independent of my own will, would happen, to prevent the fault I was about to commit. My remembrance of other events is confused and dim. I know that I scribbled a few lines to my mother, that I went out by the garden gate, and that I ran down the little path which leads to the Loire. At the first turn, I met the person who undertook to be the accomplice of my disobedience. I followed her to the carriage without either of us speaking a word. But as soon as we were seated side by side, Madame R. embraced me with great protestations of love and admiration: I was a new Sainte Chantal, trampling flesh and blood underfoot; a Sainte Elizabeth of Hungary. God would bless me, for having preferred Him to earthly affections, and above all for having refused to marry a Protestant, &c., &c. She poured forth a torrent of high-sounding phrases. I had neither the inclination nor the strength to reply. Nature resumed her rights: I burst into tears."

Madame R. presented the runaway at the house of the Sisters of —, which she had already visited. The mother superior, Madame Blandine, and two other nuns, awaited her arrival. They embraced her, and conducted her first to the chapel, and then to the lodging prepared. The Abbé Desherbiers, who knew the warmth of her father's temper, had expressly forbidden her to take away *anything*, to avoid all possibility of being accused of abstracting property. She, therefore, had no clothes besides those on her back. All these circumstances had been foreseen. Lying on the bed were all necessary articles.

At the first sound of the bell Mademoiselle Soubeyran was up and dressed. A lay sister came to help her inexperience. She showed her how to make her bed, and spoke a few words in a subdued tone of voice. It was the time of deep silence before mass.

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No one might break that silence, except in case of absolute necessity. As soon as mass was over, the nuns crowded round the new comer, overwhelming her with caresses and exaggerated praise. She recognised the nuns who had been particularly attentive to her last year. A handsome Arlesienne, styled in religion Madame Claudia*—completely took her under her charge. She had received the order to show the boarding-school, the embroidering-room, the gardens, and the school for poor children, all of which were comprised in the establishment.

Madame Claudia was a charming creature, scarcely twenty years of age, but whose profession already dated several years back. Her sweetly serene countenance was somewhat sad. It was easy to see she was fulfilling a duty imposed upon her, although she performed it with perfect grace. No commonplace phrase about the world and its dangers, about the happiness of breaking with its temptations, escaped from her pallid lips. She showed everything calmly and coldly, without comment or observation. She had none of that verbose and theatrical enthusiasm which is only too common under a religious dress. Her large black eyes seemed moist and their eyelids red, either from fatigue or frequent tears. Every movement appeared to betray either suffering or some secret grief.

After dinner came recreation, which was animated and even noisy. The nuns amused themselves like schoolgirls. The more severe the order was in its private discipline, the more liberty it indulged in during the hours of relaxation. A few elderly nuns basked in the sunshine, sheltered from the wind, in company with the superior; the others gambolled and screamed without restraint.

Recreation over, silence recommenced, and the would-be nun was handed over from Madame Claudia to the superior and the director, Father Gabriel, who questioned her at great length. She told them, in her own way, the story of her projected marriage with a young man loose in his morals and a Protestant into the bargain. She related the persecutions she imagined she had endured, the miraculous

way in which God had enlightened her, and the ardent desire with which He had inspired her to devote herself entirely to His service.

The director only, an elderly and very serious man, made some objections, which seemed greatly to annoy the superior. Although Madame Blandine kept silence while he spoke, her countenance manifested her displeasure. In a harsh and angry voice she asked him whether, in consequence of the opinion he had just expressed, she ought to send Mademoiselle Soubeyran home, or keep her.

"Keep her, if you must," he replied, shrugging his shoulders, after a pause: "but I am far from being so sure as you are about the soundness of this vocation. We shall see; time will show which of us has formed the correcter judgment. I should send her back to her parents; but you have got your postulant, and may do what you like with her. For my part, I wash my hands of the matter."

As soon as Father Gabriel was gone, Madame Blandine gave her version of what had happened. The good father was a pious and worthy man, only his mind was a little weakened by age and austerities. She had sent a request to Paris for a younger and more capable director, but had been refused. They dared not supersede this one. He possessed very considerable property; it was he who had built the new church and more than half the convent. By displeasing him, they feared they might induce him to leave his fortune to certain nephews, and so frustrate the House's expectations. It was therefore necessary to put up with the old man's whims, &c. &c.

When this explanation was over, Madame Blandine embraced the girl again, urging her to pray, to humble herself before God, to scrupulously fulfil every act of a religious life. She then took from her bureau the rough copy of a letter, a sort of circular, which probably served for every postulant to send to her family, and which was a model of conventional coldness. "Unfeeling as I was," Sister X. observes, "it shocked me; I therefore availed myself of the permission to modify certain expressions it contained."

Whether this letter was sent, or whether it was kept by the superior, Sister X. was never able to ascertain. A week, a fortnight, three weeks, a month elapsed, and no reply. She became anxious, feeling a vague presentiment that regrets and sorrows might

* In many congregations it is usual to call both the nuns of the choir and the lay sisters "madame." Religious women, of whatever class, still address each other as "sister;" but a lay sister, addressing a nun of the choir, or speaking of her, ought to say "madame." The object seems to be to convey the idea that a nun and an old maid are very different beings.

possibly follow the opening phase of enthusiasm.

The rules prevented the question whether any answer to this letter had arrived. Madame Blandine now and then said, "There is nothing, my dear daughter. Accept this first trial of your faith courageously. Pray, pray much. If your parents abandon you, you will always have the good God for your father, the Holy Virgin for your mother, and the amiable Jesus for your spouse. Your family's silence is a sort of acquiescence in the step you have taken," &c.

The transition from this to the question of dowry was logical and easy. Madame Blandine made minute inquiries respecting the fortune of Sister X.'s parents; if she knew the conditions of their marriage contract; from which side the property came. But the girl was almost ignorant on this important point. She knew of no other property belonging to her parents besides the house and garden where they resided. They had lost money, but not all. She believed that the small income was principally derived from her mother.

The superior was very attentive. "So far, so good," she said. "Now tell me frankly; you ought to know your parents' tempers: do you think them capable of disinheriting you?"

"I don't know. My father is hot-tempered, but weak. As to my mother, I have always heard her speak against convents, and severely blame those who left their fortune to them. My mother is quieter than my father; nevertheless, I believe she is firmer and more decided in her opinions."

"You must write again, my dear daughter. How much may La Tour be worth, house and garden together?"

"I have occasionally heard it valued at ten or twelve thousand francs."

"Moreover, your parents must possess the means of portioning you off, since your marriage was quite a settled thing; and nothing but the most providential circumstances prevented its being an accomplished fact."

"I have heard some talk, dear reverend mother, of thirty thousand francs, invested in the funds; and I fancy that——"

"Thirty thousand francs! What a deal of good might be done with such a sum! What a pity, my dear daughter, that your parents don't understand the happiness and the holiness of your vocation! Instead of portioning you for the world, why don't they devote the money to the glory of

God? But we must not think of it; we must not even suppose that they will give you the merest trifle, at least at present. Isn't that your opinion, my poor dear child?"

"You see, my mother, they have not condescended to send me an answer."

"You will get an answer by-and-bye. We will pray so fervently to Jesus and to His most holy and most powerful mother, that they will be sure to accord you that favour. Courage, then, my daughter. God has granted you a good part, which shall not be taken from you."

One day Madame Blandine sent for Sister X. at recreation time. She had just received a letter, she said, from a curé in the environs of St. Marceau, who did not wish his name to be mentioned. On entering her room, Sister X.'s first movement was to seize the letter. Madame Blandine at first smiled; then, assuming her authoritative look, she said, "How worldly you still are, my poor child! What haste! what curiosity! Go back to recreation. This evening you shall know what is in the letter."

"But at least, ma mère, tell me what is going on at St. Marceau. Is my father well or ill? And my mother?"

"Gently, my daughter; things are going on better than you fancy. Ask me no further questions. Return to the garden at once. I wish to mortify your carnal sentiments a little, especially your curiosity."

Sister X. retired, offended with this little scolding, which was the first she had received. Hitherto, all had been sugar and honey. After supper she watched every movement, expecting to be sent for from one minute to another. But no sign was made, and it was not until the close of the subsequent service that the summons came. This time Sister X. rose slowly, and mounted the staircase with measured steps. After knocking at the door, she opened it composedly, and remained standing until it should please Madame Blandine to motion her to be seated.

"That is much better, my dear daughter," she said, smiling in the most gracious manner. "My little lesson has done you a deal of good. Come, and let me kiss you."

All anger vanished at this kindly reception.

"Sit close to me," she continued, "in order that we may talk without disturbing the silence of the house. Here is the letter I mentioned. Read it yourself."

The handwriting was not that of the curé of St. Marceau, nor any other that Sister X. recognised; the characters seemed rather to have been traced by a female hand. At the top of the page was the famous Jesuit formula, A.M.D.G., i.e., *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, and the superior was addressed as "Madame and very dear sister in J. C." It began by stating that the matters about which information was requested had not made so much noise as had been supposed; that M. and Madame Soubeyran had expected their daughter to leave them, sooner or later. Still it had put them a little out of temper, and M. Soubeyran had vowed he would never give his daughter a son of dower. He had obtained a three months' leave of absence, and they were now making a trip to Gascony, probably to divert their thoughts. Those who saw them start said they were cheerful. The writer gave it as his opinion, that, in a few months' time, they would forget their displeasure.

"Well!" said Madame Blandine, when Sister X. laid the unlucky letter on her writing-table. "Well, my dear daughter, you don't seem pleased. Come, tell me what is the matter. Do you regret having given yourself entirely to God? If so, you have only to say a word. The world is ready to open to you its perfidious arms."

"That word, dear reverend mother, I shall certainly not speak. My father and mother think no more about me. They are gone—travelling for amusement—without a syllable of farewell, without the least expression of regret."

"Alas! my poor child, such is the case with all earthly affections—affections which have not God for their basis and their only object. Still, I *am* a little surprised at the suddenness of your parents' resignation. I attribute it to your fervent prayers and the neuvaine, the nine days' devotion, we have just completed."

Sister X. retired, unable to make any reply, tormented by the most painful reflections. What! had the father and mother, who loved her so dearly, accepted eternal separation without a word of remonstrance! George, too, had forgotten her, and had taken no steps to get her back! That night the girl thought over the strange conduct of the Abbé Desherbiers and Mademoiselle Dufougeray, and began to see things in their true light, although it was now a little late.

In this perplexity, she naturally turned

to Father Gabriel, not being satisfied with Madame Blandine's insidious manners and phraseology, whose affected physiognomy, as her postulant now bethought her, was one of those which promise no good. She was about forty years of age, of middle height, and vulgar bearing. Her pale and puffy countenance was slightly marked with the small-pox; the lower half was oval, the upper part square, corresponding to the shape of her head. Her eyebrows were faintly marked by a few soft and sandy hairs; the colour of her deep-set eyes was indescribable, for, according to the light, they changed from dark grey, through lighter shades, to yellowish tints. Her nose was flat, and nearly level with her cheeks; her thin lips smiled caressingly, or threatened, according to occasion. Certainly she was not handsome, and made no pretensions to being so; what she did care about, was to manage and overbear every one with whom she came in contact. Very influential with her former boarders, many of whom consulted her, her advice was almost always scrupulously followed.

Such was the person in whom Sister X. had hitherto placed unbounded confidence. The charm was broken now, and, without her suspecting it, the prey was slipping through her fingers to place her in the hands of her adversary.

Sister X. patiently awaited the day of confession to open her mind to Father Gabriel. He happened to be out of temper, and listened to her confession without speaking. When it was finished, he said, "Collect your thoughts; I will give you absolution."

"Mon père," she said, "permit me to talk to you a little longer. I want your advice. I don't know what to do. I am uneasy, irresolute, thoroughly wretched."

"Ah!" he said. "Already?"

She could only answer by suppressed sobs. At this the old man, usually so harsh and blunt, immediately became kind and affectionate in his manner.

"You weep, my dear child," he said. "What has happened to you, within and without? Open your heart to me. Fear nothing. You may speak to me frankly, in the certainty of meeting with equal frankness on my part."

"Mon père, my parents have not once written to me. They have set off on a long journey without any thought of me, without a word, even so much as a severe reproach."

"Ought that to surprise you, my daughter? Have you forgotten your own thoughtless, inconsistent conduct, as far as they are concerned?"

"But, my good father, I have several times entreated them to grant me their pardon."

"Yes, I know. Under your superior's dictation, you have written some of those commonplace letters which are more offensive than absolute silence. Do you think that sufficient to heal the wound you have inflicted on the hearts of affectionate parents, to whom, as an only child, you ought to have been a consolation and a support in their declining years? Who could advise you to act in that way? Who encouraged and guided you in such an ill-judged enterprise?"

"The first idea was my own—at least, so I fancy; but the curé of St. Marceau, the Abbé Desherbiers, my confessor during two years, fostered the notion, which in truth was at first only the whim of a spoiled child who did not know when she was well off. Now he also abandons me; both he and the person who helped me to correspond with him after my father had compelled me to take another confessor."

"And this Abbé Desherbiers—did he reply to your letters? Did he continue the correspondence without your father's and mother's knowledge?"

"Mon Dieu, yes."

"Imprudence—folly! What was his age? Was he an old man?"

"No, mon père; he was young—not more than two or three-and-thirty."

"And he has not written to you since you have been here?"

"Not once, mon père. When I left home, he sent me word that, as soon as I was at Orleans, he would come and see me. Madame Blandine allowed me to write to him. I sent him three letters, one after the other. I have written to Mademoiselle Dufougeray: neither have answered, and this silence and abandonment are killing me."

"I should like it better if your sorrow sprang from family affection."

"It does so, too; but since I ought to open completely my heart and conscience, I will avow that I feel a slight degree of

resentment. I think my parents might have taken some steps to induce me to return. Their disdainful treatment crushes my spirit. And then, I cannot help harbouring strange suspicions. I am distrustful. I am afraid either that my letters have been detained by our reverend mother, or that the answers have been intercepted."

Father Gabriel made no reply at first. His face was pale and sad in its expression. He passed his hand in an absent way through the profusion of grey locks which overshadowed his forehead. After a long silence, he said, "Come to me to-morrow after mass; this is a serious matter, and I must reflect upon it. Meanwhile, don't be too anxious; put your trust in God; and, above all, don't breathe a word to anybody—mind, not to anybody. Remember, such is your confessor's advice."

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